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HANDWRITING TESTS FOR USE IN SCHOOL SURVEYS

FRANK N. FREEMAN
University of Chicago

The following material was prepared for the surveys of Denver, Colorado, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, and is presented for the benefit of those who wish to make surveys in their own school systems.

To the Teachers:

HANDWRITING TEST

The aim of this test is to measure the writing ability of the children. Two kinds of writing will be studied: first, the writing which is produced when the child's mind is on something besides the writing; and, secondly, writing which is produced when the child has his mind mainly on the writing and is consciously trying to make it good, as in the formal writing-lesson.

Composition test.—The first type of test is the simpler and we shall consider that first. For this test nothing should be said to the child about his writing. He should be given something to do which requires writing but which will attract his attention mainly to subject-matter. Such a situation can be arranged by asking the pupil to write a composition. Any topic may be chosen which is within the interests of the children of the particular grade. It is well to choose a topic which is related to subjects which have recently been treated in the class. Allow fifteen or twenty minutes—long enough to permit all the children to write several lines, but do not hurry them. There is no objection to making an outline before the writing begins. Then collect the papers, and keep them to put with those of the second test. *Do nothing to attract the child's attention to his writing during this exercise.*

Formal writing-test material.—In the second test we have to consider more particularly the characteristics of writing which we wish to measure. A moment's consideration makes it clear that good writing must meet two general requirements: it must be

legible and it must be fairly rapid. In dealing with the compositions collected in the composition test, we can measure only the appearance or form, since in composition the child does not write continuously. In this test, however, we shall measure the speed as well as the quality of the writing, and this necessitates so planning the conditions that the child will be writing continuously during a given time. The best method of insuring continuous writing is to have the class write from memory. In the special directions given below, passages are given for the various grades from the second to the eighth. *As the first step, then, let each class thoroughly memorize beforehand the selection for its grade.* In memorizing it is well to let the children write the selection once or twice, but do not give writing drill (analysis of the letters, etc.). To guard against loss of time from the failure of memory during the test the selection may also be placed on the board. During the preliminary work the preparation of the pupils should be in subject-matter, not penmanship.

Time.—The speed of the writing will be reckoned by counting the number of letters per minute written by each child. It is therefore necessary that the time be carefully and conscientiously controlled and that the children begin promptly, write all the time, and end promptly. *Each class should write exactly two minutes, as timed by the second-hand of a watch.* Care should be taken to see that each child is ready to write. Each one should have previously written the heading given below, should know what he is to write, and should have pen or pencil and paper ready at the starting-signal. Each one should also *instantly* stop at the stopping-signal, even if in the middle of a word.

The quality of the writing will be graded by an analysis of the writing itself.

Directions to the class.—Speed and quality will have equal weight in judging the excellence of the writing. It is therefore necessary that no more emphasis be laid on one of these characteristics than upon the other in the mind of the pupil. To insure uniformity of emphasis, the same instructions should be given all the classes, substantially as follows: In this exercise we wish to find out how well you can write. The writing of our class will be compared with that of other classes in other schools. It is necessary to write as

much as you can in the time that you will have and also to make the writing look as well as you can. If the writing is slow or bad looking, it will be graded down. Repeat the stanza if you get through before the time is up. Begin writing when I say 'Begin,' and stop instantly when I say 'Stop.' Write all the time. If you forget, look at the board. Ready. Begin."

Collection and heading of papers.—When the time is up, collect the papers and *put together the papers of each child from the two tests*. Be sure that each paper in the two tests has a heading (not written during the time allotted to the test) containing the following items: *Name, age, grade, school, and date*. The teacher's name should either be written on each paper by the children or indorsed on each paper by the teacher.

Paper.—The paper used should be such as is commonly used in the school system for writing, and should be uniform for a given grade in all classes and schools.

Pen or pencil.—The pen should be used in all the grades in which the pupils have used the pen for approximately half a year. In the grades below, the pencil should be used. The practice should be uniform throughout the system, as in the use of paper.

The selections.—The following selections should be used in grades indicated and should be memorized beforehand, as directed.

SECOND GRADE

Mix a pancake,
Stir a pancake,
Pop it in a pan.
Fry a pancake,
Toss a pancake,
Catch it if you can.

THIRD AND FOURTH GRADES

The rain is raining all around,
It falls on field and tree,
It rains on the umbrellas here,
And on the ships at sea.

FIFTH TO EIGHTH GRADES

Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
 This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
 From wandering on a foreign strand!